

# Teaching Philosophy

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When asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Part of the way we love God with our mind is by learning, studying, and applying our knowledge in ways that honor him and bless other people.

Christian higher education combines each aspect of this command, integrating the spiritual and the academic. It influences the student as a whole person, and as a part of a community. Beyond the classroom, institutions of Christian higher education are wise to implement the use of chapels, small group Bible studies, and extracurricular activities that promote discipleship and the shaping of a Christian worldview. Graduates gain more than a degree. They spiritually mature as they identify their unique role in God’s mission in this world and their lives personally. They explore and participate in service to God and others. This impacts not only the students, but the lives of those around them, to the ends of the earth. Clearly, Christian higher education is an effective strategy toward the sanctification of the mind and transformation of our world.

I teach so that I might serve God’s Kingdom and Church by helping others to obey the command to love the Lord our God with all of our minds through disciplined study and action. This is his gift of equipping the saints for works of service.

The ideal learning environment eliminates any sense of fear, makes learning fun, and is a collaboration between students and teacher all working together toward the same goal. It employs a variety of techniques including lecture, seminar discussion, humor, video, trial-and-error, object lessons, and assignments to apply learning.

One of my students wrote, “I have learned a lot about how to interpret different things. This is because of my teacher Mr. Baney. I have learned what it truly means to love Jesus. I have also learned what that entails, both easy and hard.” There’s a palpable moment when students first come to understand and apply the concepts that are being taught to them. The jaw-dropped-open moment is extremely rewarding to me. I enjoy many such moments with my students. I hope to experience even more with you.

A number of teachers have been a tremendous inspiration to me. I remember clearly the genuine personal concern shown to me by my favorite teacher, Martha Walker, the innovative challenges given to me by my high school creative writing teacher, Rachel Yanac, and the examples I aspire to follow in my graduate school Hebrew professor, Paul Overland, and my doctoral professor, Josh Pagán. I also remember some negative experiences that I have had as a student, warning me from becoming the kind of teacher whom I did not prefer - those who instilled fear, presented themselves as arrogant, or were unreasonably unfair. These examples have influenced my understanding of the best classroom experiences, and have shaped me into the teacher I am today.

My teaching experience includes ages ranging from middle school students to adults in PhD courses, from American citizens to international residents, from the academic classroom to the church small group Bible study, from those fluent in English to those with almost zero understanding of English language or American culture. I have learned much from these various classroom settings.

Considering the classroom environment, we learn more when we are having fun; fear often inhibits learning. Students in my classroom know that we will laugh as we learn. We regularly address how words are defined to ensure that we are communicating the same meaning. Ideas are learned cumulatively, systematically adding to understanding and application. Because students learn in a variety of ways, I include visual, audio, tactile, and sensory experiences as often as

possible. One of my students commented, “The activities related to the topic. Even if it didn’t seem like it, they would turn out to relate in a way that made me think harder.” I make use of object lessons and the dry erase board daily, and encourage students to write or draw things that help them learn best.

Beginning in 2015, I’ve had the pleasure of teaching classes for English as a Second Language for international residents of my city, and leading a staff of four teachers. In this environment, I have mentored (and also learned from) excellent teachers who reported to me. Thanks to the growing need of additional students and the addition of new teachers, we were able to expand from one course to two. I organized volunteers to help with transportation to classes and childcare when needed. These classes have included curriculum that I have developed, addressing vocabulary, grammar, spelling, pronunciation, role play, and conversational skills. After practicing ordering etiquette, my students greatly enjoyed field trips to local restaurants. In addition to studying language, my students also had the opportunity to learn about American culture, as many of them recently arrived in the states and are still acclimating to their new surroundings. By sharing holidays, traditions, parties, food, and clothing, students were able to observe and participate in a number of new elements of culture. Likewise, my students were invited to share elements of their own culture with the class. My students were invited to use a number of digital tools to further practice vocabulary and pronunciation outside of class. Thankfully, I was able to coordinate with three other local ESL groups to maximize opportunities for my students to study and practice their learning. Best of all, a number of my students have become friends as we shared and celebrated life with each other.

At the local Christian Academy, my class routines are structured after a pattern to help give students a sense of familiarity in learning. We begin by reciting a creed that declares the kind of students we aspire to be. Then we submit assignments, discuss new assignments, review, and then explore new concepts through discussion, reading, worksheets, short videos, games, and lectures. We also leave room in our routine for the occasional unexpected wonder. Over the last

five years, I've led my students systematically through studies that have focused on the Gospel of John, the book of Acts, New Testament Overview, Worldview and Religions, and more.

My students are evaluated based upon a combination of their attendance, participation, homework, and cumulative tests. While I make every effort to help students understand, appreciate, and apply the lessons taught, it remains their responsibility to complete the assigned reading and work, prepare for tests, and engage in class discussion to show evidence of their learning and apply it to real-life situations. I accept unexcused late work for a reduction in points, per school policy. Grades are earned, not given.

Jesus made disciples and sent them to do the same. As their teacher, he explained concepts and presented opportunities for his students to apply what they were learning. His intention was not merely academic, but transformational - saturating the whole person. He said follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. These three parts are an outline of discipleship (and my approach to teaching). We must follow Jesus, doing the things he did, the way he did. We must be made into something / someone different from who we were before, a measurable life-change. And we are sent to make more disciples as he made us. These three aspects are an outline for my approach to teaching.

It is important to create an inclusive learning environment. I do all I can to learn about and pray for each student by name. I model inclusive language by avoiding the use of masculine pronouns for both genders, and by explaining American idioms. I use examples from both genders. I expect that students are respectful to each other and to me (this includes addressing behaviors that are distracting to the class environment). I strive to be fair in grading, and humbly listen when students question their grades, knowing that I sometimes make mistakes. I provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities. I make every effort to call on students equally, so as to include as many as possible in class discussions. And I understand that not all students comprehend or prefer Western culture.

The relationship between teacher and student is a relationship of discipleship. Like me, students are sons and daughters in God’s family, part of the body of Jesus Christ. My authority in the classroom is granted, not to lord it over them,<sup>1</sup> but so that I might steward them toward spiritual maturity. When Jesus performed the act of service by washing his disciples feet, he said, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.”<sup>2</sup> In this case, our model teacher was showing the relationship between teacher and student is not one of power, but of service, to raise and build the student up, so that he or she might follow after the teacher’s example.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write to the church in Corinth: “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The teacher is an example to the students, both inside and outside of the classroom. Paul understood the importance of passing down the teachings when he wrote to Timothy: “the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”<sup>4</sup> This single text includes four generations of teachers and students, reminding us of the potential impact we have upon future generations.

Considering the end result, when students have completed the courses that I teach, I want them to be ready not only to understand the academic materials, but to be personally motivated to put them into practice. More than learning facts, I ask students to identify real people in their lives who are connected with the ideas described in class. We pray for, and identify ways to serve, evangelize, and bless these people, knowing we are sent on mission to them. My goals include leading every student to see himself/herself as a disciple sent on mission, with a unique, valuable role as an agent of the mission of God.

Personally, missiology is my calling. I’m driven by an insatiable compulsion to be a missiologist, to contribute meaningfully to this field, to do all I can to participate in God’s mission, and to

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:24

<sup>2</sup> John 13

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2

motivate and equip as many others as I can to do the same. The context of Christian higher education provides opportunity for me to do this. Missiology is at the core of my philosophy of Christian higher education.

In Christian higher education, we assert that truth exists and can be known objectively. Jesus identified himself as the truth.<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit reveals truth.<sup>6</sup> And the Bible is a lens through which we come to know truth about God, the world, and self.<sup>7</sup>

Every area of study finds its significance in relationship to God and his mission. Whether a student is majoring in religion, accounting, skilled nursing, or one of the many other areas of study offered, Jesus Christ is the unifying center that holds it together. What can be known about God is plain to [people]... in the things that have been made.<sup>8</sup> Because sinful minds are blind and lost,<sup>9</sup> students must learn to evaluate claims to truth by measuring them against God's Word (primary), tradition, reason, and experience. This approach to seeking truth is essential.

Christian Higher Education requires a distinctive approach to teaching, the community of student life, social relationships in student organizations and activities, and administration because it systematically influences more than what we know, but also what we think, believe, value, decide, and become. The best school honors academic excellence, engages in social responsibility, and fosters creativity in its students and faculty.

I am specifically drawn to your school because of your emphasis on spiritual formation, your academic reputation and commitment to lifelong study, your integration of faith and education, and your total commitment to Jesus Christ. The student:faculty ratio is excellent. Your location is

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<sup>5</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>6</sup> John 16:13, 15:26, 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:10.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21, 2 Samuel 23:2-3, Isaiah 59:21, Jeremiah 1:9.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 1:19-20.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 John 2:11.

near my home. My experience in pastoral ministry has revealed a great continual need for quality educators to develop students as they prepare for ministry. I desire to share my diverse education, ministry, and life-experience with your students. Thank you for considering my application.

For a list of my recent courses and lectures taught, please visit [www.pastorstevebaney.com](http://www.pastorstevebaney.com).

Sincerely,  
Steve Baney, PhD

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